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ABSTRACT

This pilot study on international relocation examined the adjustment experiences of 68 children, age 9 to 11 years, who relocated to Vienna, Austria either from their native country or from another overseas setting. The study proposed an additive model of adjustment which took into account potential sources of adjustment within the relocation situation as causes of anxiety experienced by individual children. The adjustments identified were changes in language experience, physical environment, social support systems, parental behavior, and expectations toward the relocation situation. A questionnaire was developed to measure adjustment and anxiety within the relocation situation; it rated children's scores with respect to the five adjustment independent variables and their relation to the dependent variable, anxiety. Results indicated that parental behavior was of prime importance as an adjustment factor for the children. Contrary to expectations, children experiencing greater language adjustments tended to be less anxious than those whose language was the same as that of the school they attended. Differences were also found in the expression of anxiety between different cultural groups. (Contains 19 references.) (EV)

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Living Abroad: The Adjustment of Children During International Relocation

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ABSTRACT

A pilot study was carried out in international relocation examining the adjustment experiences of 68 children aged between 9-11 years while relocating to Vienna, Austria, either from their native country or another overseas setting. An additive model of adjustment was proposed taking account of potential sources of adjustment within the relocation situation as a cause of anxiety experienced by the individual children. The adjustments identified were changes in:- 1. language experience, 2. physical environment, 3. social support systems, 4. parental behaviour and 5. expectations towards the relocation situation. A questionnaire was developed to measure adjustment and anxiety within the relocation situation, which rated the children's scores in respect of the five adjustment independent variables, in relation to the dependent variable, anxiety. Statistical analysis of the results included correlational analysis of the independent variables with the dependent variable. Further analyses were based on sample subsets such as gender, prior linguistic experience and moving history of the children. Results indicated that parental behaviour is of prime importance as an adjustment factor for the children. Contrary to expectations children experiencing greater language adjustments tended to be less anxious than those whose language was the same as that of the school they attended. Differences were found in the expression of anxiety in contrast to the number of adjustments necessitated by the relocation situation between different cultural groups as determined by mother-tongue. Future work to be undertaken as a continuation of this study is indicated.

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EARLY WORK ON INTERNATIONAL RELOCATION

A significant amount of research has addressed the experiences of the adults involved in international relocation and various theoretical perspectives have been derived from this work. Much of the work on the perceived effects of relocation on children however, has been undertaken either in an intranational context or with American children relocating outside the USA, with particular emphasis on children involved in military movements. Issues identified as related to anxiety for adults and children during adjustment to Intranational relocation include:-

Removal of social support systems (Spradley and Phillips 1972)
Loss of positive reinforcers (Guthrie 1966 & 1975)
Loss of previous roles and identity. (Church 1982)
Maternal attitudes to moving (Pedersen & Sullivan 1964)
Parental behaviour & supportiveness (Gabower, 1960, Smardo, 1981)
Parental attitudes to mobility and the job context of the wage earner (Werkman, 1977)
The quality & amount of parent-child interaction (Switzer et al, 1961).

Theoretical perspectives

The early work on relocation concentrated mainly on the negative effects of an international sojourn (Stonequist, 1961). Early 'culture shock' literature for instance, characterized the phenomenon as an 'occupational disease' of those who had relocated abroad (See Oberg, 1960). Oberg explained 'culture shock' as involving anxiety stemming from cultural ambiguity and loss of familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Symptoms of this state included feelings of helplessness, irritability and homesickness and cognitive dissonance regarding one's own and host country values and expectations. The impression derived is of the prevalence of the medical model in the literature, by which 'culture shock' is seen as a 'disease' showing specific symptoms which may require remediation (see Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

The following theoretical positions, summarized under the heading of 'culture shock', were discussed by Furnham and Bochner (1986) as 'explaining' the problems of relocation for adults. The present authors extrapolated this to the possible effects on children (Stratford & Alston, 1995):

Theoretical Position	Example for children
Movement as a loss (grieving)	Friends, possessions, family members
Fatalism (locus of control)	No role in decision-making
Selective migration	Movers are already different: they survive
Expectancy value	Poor preparation: expect the worst (folklore)
Negative life events	Strain of change; new school, rules, curriculum
Value differences	School ethos, peer group

Social skills deficits	Coping, making new friends, learning the ropes

Based on recent work the authors have included a further theoretical standpoint:-

Changes in self-identity	Loss of feeling of identity, nobody understands me, likes me.

Recently a more positive stance has emerged in regard to findings on international relocation. The possibility for individual growth and personal development resulting from an overseas sojourn has been stressed (Brein & David, 1971, Adler, 1975). This growth and development is seen as arising from the transcendence of the need for and reliance upon environmental support during transitional experiences leading to increased self-support.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELOCATION ADJUSTMENT QUESTIONNAIRE - RAQ

Based on the theories discussed initially, an additive model of adjustment during international relocation was derived, by which an association between five independent variables and the dependent variable - Relocation Anxiety was sought (Alston & Nieuwoudt, 1991). The independent variables were the degree of adjustments experienced during changes in the Physical Environment, Language, Social Support Network and Parental Behaviour, as well as Expectations towards the new environment[2]. This model led to the development of the Relocation Adjustment Questionnaire (RAQ), which was tested on 68 children from four international schools in Vienna, Austria. The participants were aged between 9-11 years (the so-called 'latency' stage) to allow for maximum cognitive maturity without the confounding variables introduced by the onset of puberty. The results are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RAQ DATA

SCHEDULE SECTIONS	**N = 68** $r_{crit} = 0.20$
Language	-0.24
Environment	0.24
Social Support	0.03
Parental	0.43
Adjustment tot.	
Language removed	0.39
Expectations	0.16

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[2] Expectations refers to the degree to which the children felt they were informed about the setting and the degree to which their expectations conformed to reality.

The results are summarized below:-[3]

1 A significant negative relationship was found between adjustments in **language** and the anxiety experienced. This was in the opposite direction to that which was intuitively expected ($r = -0.24$, $p < .025$).

2 A significant relationship was found between adjustments and the effects of **environmental** changes such as changes in opportunity for sport and change in school and anxiety, ($r = 0.24$, $p < .025$).

3 A significant relationship was found between adjustments in **changes in parental behaviour** such as changes in access to parents and parental mood and anxiety, ($r = 0.43$, $p < .005$).

4. A significant correlation of all **adjustment variables** except language (0.39, $p < 0.005$) was found. Language was removed from this calculation due to its negative value.

Subset analysis

The data was divided into subsets on gender, language experience and the moving status of the child and these subsets were examined for potential between-group variation.

1. Moving status

Moving status refers to whether the child had moved internationally for the first time (First Time Movers - FTM's) or had experienced multiple international moves - so called "Third Culture Kids" (TCK's). This analysis gave the following results:-

Table 2
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MOVING STATUS DATA

SCHEDULE SECTIONS	FTM'S N = 39 rcrit = 0.25	TCK'S N = 29 rcrit = 0.29
Language	-0.50	0.27
Environment	0.48	0.17
Social Support	0.31	0.34
Parental	0.57	0.36
Adjustment tot.		
Language removed	0.62	0.48
Expectations	0.43	0.38

[3] r refers to the Pearson correlation coefficient, p is the related probability.

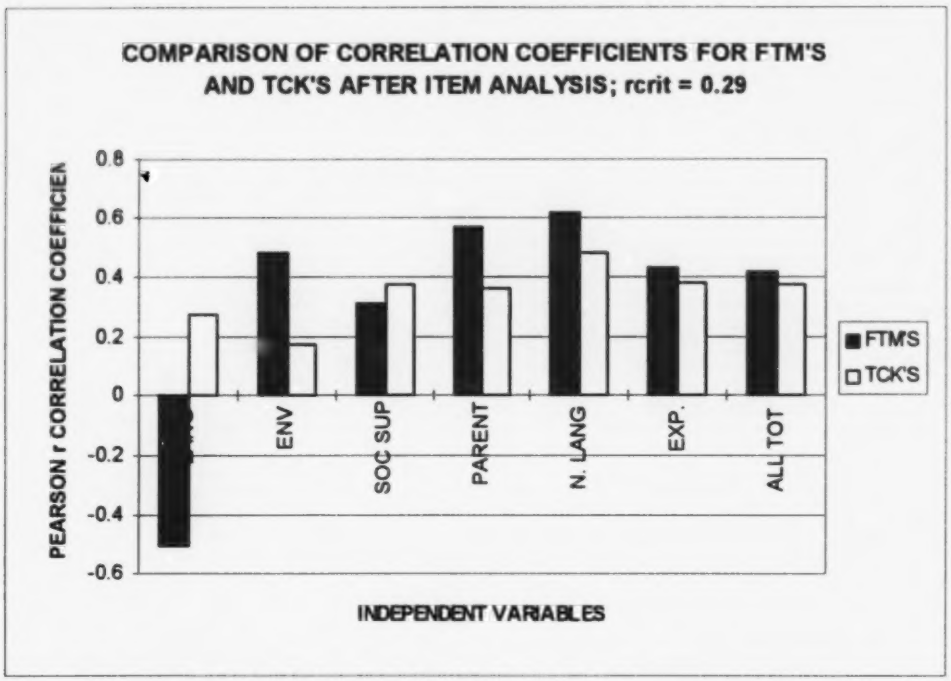
FTM & TCK ANALYSIS OF MEANS

LANGUAGE
FTM = 7.3 TCK = 2.5
t = 7.75 p < 0.001

ENVIRONMENT
FTM = 5.36 TCK = 4
t = 2.3 p <0.01

ANXIETY
FTM = 20.8 TCK = 23.1
T = -1.5 p < 0.07

FIGURE 1



1. **First Time Movers** responded more anxiously to changes in parental behaviour (r=0.57, p<0.0025) environmental changes (r=0.48, p<0.005) and language (r= -0.50 (p<0.005). The latter, however, is in a direction contrary to intuition. Language changes were measured by noting changes in more than one language, and changes in script, as well as own perceived competence in the new languages.

2. **Third Culture Kids** responded most strongly to changes in parental behaviour (r=0.36, p<0.025)and social support (r=0.34, p<0.025). Changes in language, environmental variables and expectations, were not found to be significant. The total adjustment score was correlated r=0.48, p<0.001 and t tests showed the anxiety mean to be slightly but not significantly higher for TCK's than for FTM's.

3. t tests revealed a significant difference between the mean for the language variable of the TCK and FTM groups (t=10.84, p<0.001) and also of the expectations of the two groups

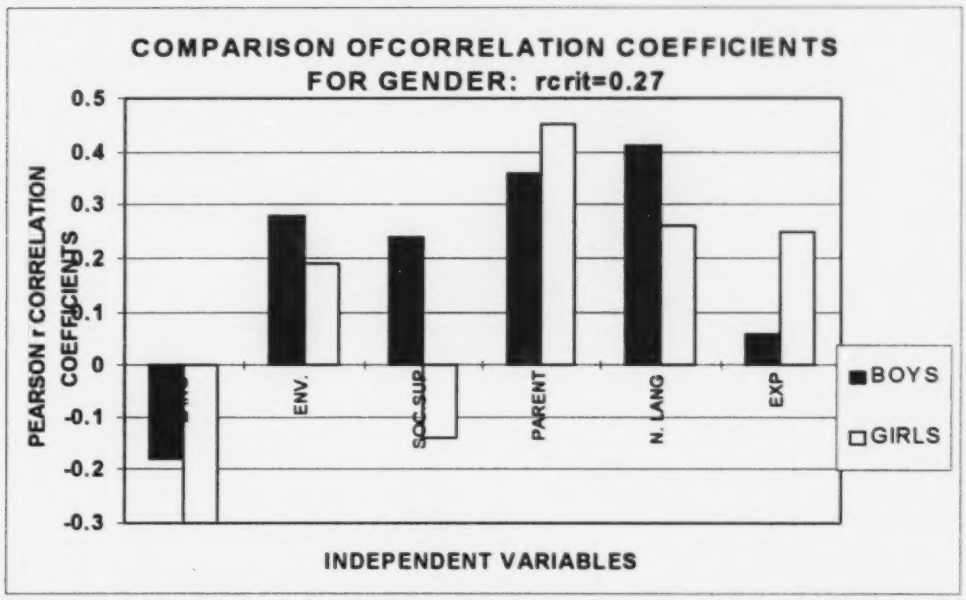
of participants towards the new environment (t=16-17, p.<0.001).

2. Gender

Table 3
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GENDER DATA

SCHEDULE SECTIONS	BOYS N = 35 r_{crit} = 0.27	GIRLS N = 33 r_{crit} = 0.27
Language	-0.18	-0.30
Environment	0.28	0.19
Social Support	0.24	-0.14
Parental Adjustment tot.	0.36	0.45
Language removed	0.41	0.36
Expectations	0.06	0.25

FIGURE 2



When the data was divided into subsets on gender, it was found that boys reacted most strongly to changes in the environment (r=0.28, p<0.05) and changes in parental behaviour (r=0.36, <0.025). Girls showed a stronger correlation of linguistic (r=-0.30, p<0.005) and parental changes with anxiety (r=0.45, p<0.005). This is in accordance with expectations based on behavioural and developmental theory for gender differences (Archer, 1993). Expectations for the relocation situation were also found to bear a modest but significant relationship to anxiety

for girls (r= 0.25, p<0.05). The correlation of total adjustment with anxiety was 0.41, p<0.005 for boys and 0.36, p<0.025 for girls. No significant difference was found between the means of any of the independent variables or the dependent variable.

3. Language status

When subjects were divided into groups on the basis of language, namely children who were English mother tongue (EMT) and those who used English as a second language (ESL), both t tests and correlation analysis was carried out.

FIGURE 3

ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE DATA

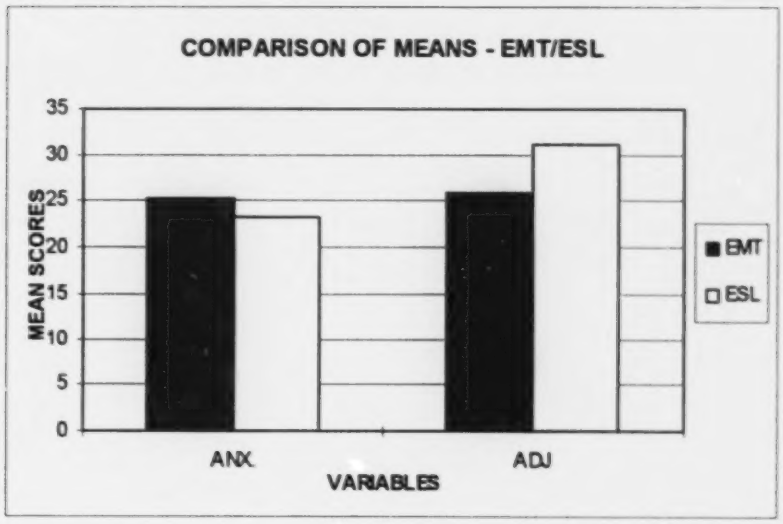


Table 4

ESL/EMT: ANALYSIS OF MEANS

LANGUAGE
EMT = 5.1 ESL = 9.9
t = -7.0 p = <0.001

ADJUSTMENT
EMT = 25.9 ESL = 31.1
T = -2.5 p = <0.007

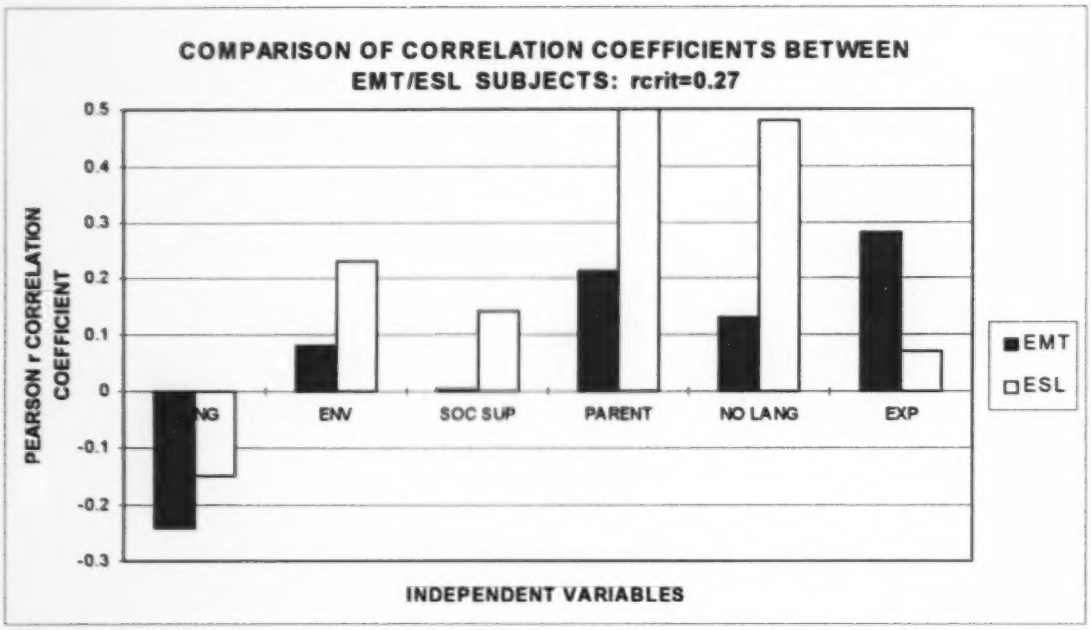
SOCIAL SUPPORT
EMT = 9.77 ESL = 12.03
t = -2.4 p = <0.01

ANXIETY
EMT = 25.2 EMT = 23.1
t =1.4 p = <0.08

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS - EMT/ESL

SCHEDULE SECTIONS	EMT N = 35 rcrit = 0.27	ESL N = 33 rcrit = 0.27
Language	-0.24	-0.15
Environment	0.08	0.23
Social Support	0.003	0.14
Parental Adjustment tot.	0.21	0.50
Language removed	0.13	0.48
Expectations	0.28	0.07

FIGURE 4



The results are summarized below:-

1. There were significant differences in means between perceived adjustment of the two groups. ESL children reported experiencing more adjustments than EMT children ($t+2.05$, $p<0.05$) see Figure 3.

2. English as a second language children reported less anxiety than English mother tongue children during the relocation. t tests performed to compare the mean Anxiety scores of English speakers with non-English speakers found a mean difference of $t=1.39$, $p<0.08$ which was however not statistically significant (Figure 3).

3. t tests showed a marked difference between the means of reported changes in social support networks for ESL children versus EMT children.

4. As expected the ESL group reported greater changes in language experience than the EMT group, who were being educated in a same language school environment.

5. The ESL group showed a very marked correlation of parental changes with anxiety, as opposed to the EMT group, for which the coefficient did not reach statistical significance.

ONGOING WORK

The RAQ has been subjected to validity and reliability testing through factor and item analysis. The results are being pursued by a postal distribution of the questionnaire to international schools worldwide. The results obtained appear to be confirmed in the questionnaires returned to date.

Additional work undertaken includes:-

- An ideographic study of family interactions based on family interviews relating to the event of relocation.

- A case study approach undertaken with six subjects during the first nine months of their relocation in Austria.

- Exploration of the role of self-concept and self-esteem during the process of overseas relocation through a course/play group intervention for recently relocated participants.

- A pre-test - post-test experiment involving an experimental group and a control group, using standardized self-concept and self-esteem scales, included as a part of the course/play group procedure.

CONCLUSIONS

The empirical results obtained show a linear relationship between anxiety and:-

1. **Parental behaviour:** there is a consistently strong correlation between changes in parental behaviour and anxiety. This is shown in the complete data and also in the subset analysis. The strongest correlations ($r=0.57$) were found for children who have moved overseas for the first time (FTM's) and for children whose mother tongue is not English (ESL), ($r=0.48$).

2. **Changes in the physical environment:** This is evident in the analysis of the complete data set and becomes particularly strong in the subset analysis for FTM's ($r=0.48$), whereas no significant correlation is noted for children who have moved overseas more than once (TCK's).

The correlation between anxiety and changes in the physical environment was stronger for boys than for girls.

3. **Changes in social support networks:** In the analysis of the entire data no significant correlation was found. However these coefficients were significant for both FTM's and TCK's after item and factor analysis.

4. The expectations of the children were not found to correlate significantly in the complete data, however after item and factor analysis was completed the statistic was significant for both FTM's and TCK's and also for children whose mother tongue was English.

5. **Changes in language experience:** These showed a significant correlation in the complete data. The relationship was strong in the subset analysis for both First Time Movers and for girls. The correlation however, was a negative one which indicates that children who perceived high levels of language change, expressed low levels of anxiety and vice versa. The t tests for the EMT and ESL subsets showed that the EMT group recorded significantly lower levels of adjustment particularly to language, but also higher levels of anxiety. It is thought that the cultural background of the children may be implicated in this result.

6. The additive model of adjustment was supported by the empirical data when expectations were excluded from the adjustment total.

7. Owing to the nature of the questions asked, expectations are related to preparation and should therefore not be considered an adjustment variable, but rather a factor which contributes to adjustment.

8. The negative correlations found in almost all of the language data were excluded from the adjustment total. This indicates that language serves a different function in the adjustment process to the other three variables. It is not clear what this function may be at the present time.

9. One particular source of anxiety does not predominate for the Third Culture Kids, but on moving several times the concerns are as pronounced but more diffuse in causation. A different language however ceases to be of such pronounced significance as for the First Time Movers and the changes in environment assume less importance. It appears from this that TCK's become oriented less toward environmental cues and factors and more towards personal and relationship ones than FTM's.

10. From the results of the analysis of the language data. It appears that the ESL children, while experiencing less overall anxiety than the EMT participants, may feel a greater dependance on both their peer group and parents during relocation. Parental factors

showed a particularly marked correlation with anxiety. This suggests that ESL children moving into an English speaking school environment may be more susceptible to stress in the new environment and more needy in terms of parental support and stability. In addition, it is suggested that the difference between the means of reported changes in social support networks for ESL and EMT children relate to a decrease in ease of making friends due to the change in the lingua franca of the peer group.

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